

Report for the World Urban Forum 2004

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Time: 13.09-17.09 2004

Place: Forum, Barcelona, Spain

By who: The event was organized by UN-Habitat a UN body working mainly with human settlements, an issue with ranging within a enormous amount of issues. One of the biggest issues are related to urbanization. Check out: www.un-habitat.org for more information:

What is Urbanization: Estimates say that in 2050 2/3 of the world population will be living in urbanized areas opposed to the 2/3 of the worlds' population living in rural areas by 1950. This development brings a long a big range of issues and challenges that local, national government faces every day. This can be everything from decreasing the amount of slum dwellers, improving sanitation, providing clean drinking water to combating juvenile delinquency, handling challenges caused by the increased number of multi-ethnic cities, decreasing violence to youth participation. As you can see UN-Habitat is trying to find sustainable solutions to all of these challenges.

What is the World Urban Forum: Held for the second time this year, WUF is trying to meet all the challenges connected with urbanization. It is unique in its kind in the way it gathered Civil society, local and national authorities all in one place. The aim of WUF is to gather all these important stakeholders in dialogues to look for the best solutions to the challenges that urbanization poses. This was done through around 20 different seminars and dialogues a day where all these stakeholders could interact freely. In my opinion though, many of the seminars could have been much more including, since they sometimes only involved the invited panellist and experts. Then again this is a big step for the UN to open up this much and recognize the importance of both civil society and local authorities. The WUF is only meant to be a consultative body to the UN-Habitat Governing Council which is held every second year in Nairobi, Kenya. It is therefore just a meeting place for the stakeholders and to exchange best practices and to look for solutions and long term thinking. WUF is also supposed to give important feedback to different national governments for the Governing Council. In reality WUF also serves as a place of discussion and meeting for civil society and governmental sides. The two sides rarely meet on the same grounds in a typical UN setting, thus is WUF an important ground for Civil society to get their voice heard. Check out: www.un-habitat.org/wuf for more information.

My role at WUF: I applied to attend the World Urban Forum through the Norwegian youth Council (LNU). I applied in the capacity of being a CISV member and board member of CISV Oslo. But I attended WUF as a representative of the Norwegian Youth Council (LNU). The youth council has around 70 member organisation and around 600 000 young people as members. My role was to learn about UN-Habitat and follow up the work on the Youth Strategy that UN-Habitat is developing and hoping to present at the Governing Council in April. I was also going to attend the Global Youth Congress which was held as a parallel but integrated even at WUF. It was supposed to have a youth perspective on urbanization. Seminars related to youth participation in local governance, youth employment and other similar seminars were held through out the forum. The seminars were on the whole quite good, but didn't attract some of the important stakeholders, such as government officials since, in my opinion, it was labelled as a "youth Congress". In other words having a focus on youth is good, but if you separate it from the rest it actually works against the purpose it is supposed to serve.

A frustrating factor for me was when the officials from UN-Habitat encouraged the few youth representatives present (around 10 persons) and other youth(around 30), to make joint youth statements at different important ceremonies. They also wanted the youth to make policy resolution on behalf of young people. The problem was that there was no meeting point or no structures that allowed us(the young people) to make democratic decision on behalf of those present. Not having this in place made it hard to promote democratic values, something which I believe very strongly in. This wasn't something they were able to provide us with. And when some of us tried, it did not work as very few of the youth present were prepared to work on youth questions, as they were representatives from their own organisations. Some were also just students, not representing any one besides them selves. Another problem, at least to me, was that it seemed that we were expected to make decisions on behalf young people, but the reality was that the youth present represented a very randomly selected and tiny part of the youth of the world. I am very against tokenist youth participation. It is better to be a part of the other processes and influence as independent voices, in stead of pretending that there is a uniform and autonomous youth voice. At least in this forum there were no uniform youth voice, and there rarely are. If you want to make one, it is at least important that everyone is prepared for what topics that and have managed to define some common goals. This was not the case at WUF. It was very

frustrating for me being one of the only representing a national youth council as many other youth actors were very pragmatic and thought it was important "to seize" this opportunity to influence. I think that the youth perspective is a very important part of what WUF and Habitat need to integrate this perspective to their work, instead of separating it in a youth congress.

We did not make any youth statements, and we got to give UN-habitat input on their youth strategy as individuals. For me this was all a very tiring exercise, but I felt it was important that we maintain some sort of democracy. But I do realize that it is hard to combine various degrees with democracy with getting things done at the international level.

How this is relevant to CISV: I think places like this are very relevant for CISV to be present. Our ideology with cultural understanding, human rights etc are vital in achieving many of the goals set forth by UN-Habitat. For example one of the big topics was the emergence of Multi-Ethnic cities in the South. Having worked with integration of asylum seekers and Norwegian children through CISV and the World in Norway project, I could contribute with experience, but also learn. I also think it is important to bring CISVs' perspective on Peace education in to many of these settings. We have a lot of experience and our view should definitively be heard.

I also think on a more general note that CISV and the world would benefit a lot if we as an organisation managed to participate more in the world "outside CISV". I have realized after attended the UN General Assembly, the Europe, Youth and Globalisation event in Strasbourg and now WUF that a CISVs perspective is really important. And CISV can also get a lot of knowledge and inspiration in the work of strengthening and renewing our own organisation. As a comparison: the scout movement, parts which is not religious nor political, is heavily involved in global youth politics in the UN and at a regional level in structures such as the European Youth Forum. Why can't CISV also have such a role? I can also see a parallel to my own country Norway, where CISV for a long time now have had a tendency to only look at itself and not participate in national structures such as the Norwegian Youth Council. There are so many possibilities in engaging in the structures such as national youth councils.

Well, I could go on and on. But I will finish it here by summing up briefly. The Forum was a very good experience where I got a lot of impressions and ideas. I see that international youth work still have a long way to go, and that efforts from informed and engaged young people is needed not only to get real youth participation, but also that the world needs our perspective to move forward. The times when I felt that a discussion was good was when young people stood up and said their frank and honest opinion and didn't feel obstructed by conventions of how to behave etc. I hope that CISV will encourage its members to involve themselves in work "outside" CISV so that CISV and the world can benefit from an ideology which I carry in my heart always.

What happens now: I am involved in a working group on international politics in the Norwegian Youth Council, where I will be involved with the follow up and the time leading up to the Governing Council. As I will be leaving for Peru for six months in January, we will select another youth representative to follow up the work on the youth strategy before, during and after the Governing Council meeting in April. I might join the board of the Youth Council next year as I have had some unofficial requests which is very nice. But in the democratic system nothing is ready till the election next year, so time will show. I know though that I will continue my international engagement in the Youth Council in the year to come and when I arrive back from Peru.